

The Augusta Pulse

Winter 2007

For the employees and friends of the Augusta VA Medical Center

www.va.gov/augustaga

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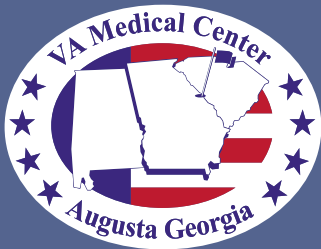
**Augusta VAMC
Wins Top Award**

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Through Research**

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Honored**

**Employee Wellness
Wants Losers**





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The Augusta Pulse is published quarterly for the employees, volunteers, partners and friends of the Augusta VA Medical Center. To submit articles or story ideas for possible publication, contact Janice Kennedy, (706) 823-1733 or via e-mail at Janice.Kennedy@va.gov.

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On the cover:
2006 Robert W. Carey Trophy

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Director's Message

I am proud to have been selected as the new Associate Medical Center Director for the Augusta VA Medical Center; and will be serving as the Acting Medical Center Director until that position is filled. I have a long history and special relationship with the Augusta VA and am well

aware of the impressive accomplishments achieved over the past years, with highlights such as the 2005 Olin E. Teague Award and the 2006 Robert W. Carey Performance Excellence Trophy Award. I also understand that it requires an outstanding staff to attain and sustain the quality care and special services provided. There are many unsung heroes in our midst; those that come in daily and make a positive difference in the lives of our patients and their families. The clinical and administrative staff along with our volunteers make going "above and beyond" a regular practice.

As we begin the New Year, it is my hope that the Augusta VA will continue to be recognized as a national leader in the Department of Veterans Affairs. This will require us to remain vigilant in our work together, maintaining the courage to face the many upcoming opportunities and challenges that lie ahead. I hope you are as excited as I am about the future.

John S. Goldman
Acting Medical Center Director



Downtown Division



Uptown Division



James F. Trusley III, Director Augusta VAMC, receives the Robert W. Carey Award from VA Secretary Jim Nicholson. Dr. Michael Kussman, Acting Under Secretary for Health, and Dr. Tom Kiernan, Chief of Staff, Augusta VAMC, hold a congratulatory letter from President George W. Bush.

The Augusta VA Medical Center was the proud recipient of the 2006 Robert W. Carey Trophy Award. This top honor was presented to James F. Trusley, Medical Center Director, and his staff by Veterans Affairs Secretary Jim Nicholson during a ceremony held November 16, in Springfield, Virginia. The Carey Award recognizes organizations within the VA that have implemented management approaches that result in sustained high levels of performance and service to veterans. Mr. Trusley explained, "This outstanding acknowledgement recognizes the dedication and excellent services provided by staff at the Augusta VA and reaffirms to me that the Augusta VA not only provides these services on a daily basis to our veterans; but continually strives for performance improvement and excellence in everything they do. This achievement is not an end, but a highlight in a continuous journey." The ceremony concluded informative training classes and poster sessions held earlier in the week as part of the Carey Symposium, *Leading Through Turbulent Times*.



The Carey Award was started 15 years ago as a way for Veterans Affairs facilities to improve their quality of care and service to the veterans served. The application focuses on the seven categories of the Malcolm Baldrige National Quality Award criteria used by high performing companies all over the world to measure their quality and performance. The seven categories include: Leadership; Strategic Planning; Customer and Market Focus; Measurement, Analysis, and Knowledge Management; Human Resource Focus; Process Management; and Business Results.



RESEARCH

IMPROVING CARE FOR VETERANS

Most patients and visitors to the Augusta VA Medical Center are aware of the many clinical services offered and outstanding facilities, but few realize that in addition to quality patient care, the Augusta VA is actively involved in research. Research is an important component and partner in patient care in any medical center, and leads to identification of novel markers for diagnosing a disease at the early stages. Research also generates insight into the reasons, causative factors, for developing a disease. This knowledge can be utilized to develop newer treatment options, promote critical thinking, and increase awareness of latest developments in the field, all of which translate into better patient care. For example, when a patient visits an urologist for suspected prostate cancer, the urologist will be utilizing the knowledge generated through research conducted at Augusta and other research centers in the country to diagnose and treat the patient. In addition to physical examinations, biochemical assays such as the increase of a protein called prostate specific antigen (PSA) in the blood are utilized to diagnose prostate cancer. The importance of PSA as a marker for prostate cancer was appreciated because of extensive research. This has helped in diagnosing prostate cancer at an early stage, which is easier to treat compared to later stage cancer. Men 50 years old or above are required to get tested

for blood PSA, a simple procedure that has contributed to significant reduction in death due to prostate cancer. There are several treatment options for prostate cancer, such as surgery, radiation therapy, hormonal therapy and newer treatments including chemotherapy. At the Augusta VA, urologist Dr. Martha Terris is an expert in prostate cancer treatment and also actively involved in research. She has conducted several studies on the effectiveness of radiation therapy alone and in combination with hormone therapy. Dr. Vijay Kumar, Associate Chief of Staff for Research and Development and key prostate cancer researcher, has demonstrated that subjecting prostate cancer cells to radiation induced death of the cancer cells. At the same time, it is possible to reduce the dose of radiation if the cells are also treated with another drug, called TRAIL (TNF α Related Apoptosis Inducing Ligand). Reducing the dose of radiation is significant and can reduce the adverse effects of high dose radiation. TRAIL is still in experimental stages as a therapeutic drug, but is a promising chemotherapeutic agent as it seems to preferentially induce death of cancer cells only. This is just one of many examples of how research conducted in Augusta complements the clinical activities and improves the lives of our nation's veterans.



To emphasize the importance of research, a separate Research Service Line was created, establishing interactions with clinicians and scientists interested in conducting biomedical, clinical and rehabilitation research. The laboratories are fully equipped with instruments necessary for conducting translational and clinical research. Although specialized equipment is purchased by investigators, several expensive pieces of equipment are provided by the Augusta VA for use by all investigators. Currently there are 113 active research projects conducted by 52 principal investigators. Each principal investigator is supported by at least one to two laboratory personnel such as technicians, post-doctoral fellows, etc. The principal investigators come from varied backgrounds including MDs, Ph.Ds, Pharm. Ds, and Registered Nurses. At present, 78 research projects are financially supported by funds from VA Central Office, National Institutes of Health, Department of Defense, American Heart Association, pharmaceutical companies and through donations from foundations and the American Legion.



Another service offered by the Research Service Line provides scientists advice on programs available through VA Central Office and other federal and non-federal agencies. Assistance is also readily available to help investigators in the preparation and submission of research proposals for funding. Funded researchers are provided laboratory space and facilities, assistance in hiring laboratory personnel, purchase of equipment and reagents for research and/or clinical assays.

An added benefit of the Augusta VA Research Service Line is to provide opportunities for VA researchers to interact with like minded investigators with our next door neighbor, the Medical College of Georgia (MCG). The two organizations enjoy a healthy scientific interaction and the majority of investigators have dual appointments with MCG and devote 5/8th of their time working for the VA. Increasing and strengthening the interactions with MCG is an ongoing

process and includes routine meetings to identify common topics for research.

Augusta is proud of its researchers and recognized three in the December Town Hall meeting who have adorned the pages of media locally and have been nationally recognized as experts in their individual fields.



Dr. Balamurali Ambati's research interests include vascularization (growth of blood vessels) in the cornea, an important part of the eye. The cornea is one of the few tissues in the body with no blood vessels flowing through it, although all other tissues around the cornea are rich in blood vessels. The absence of blood vessels in the cornea is necessary for maintaining optical clarity and optimal vision. In a recent research paper published in the journal *Nature* (one of the top journals in the world), Dr. Ambati demonstrated that the lack of blood vessels in the cornea is due to the presence of a protein that blocks vascularization. These results are of great importance in the field of vision. It is well known that one of the requirements for the growth of a tumor is to grow new blood vessels to provide nourishment to the tumor. Dr. Ambati's research provides an excellent model for testing cancer therapy drugs, since drugs that can prevent growth of new blood vessels in tumors are considered a viable option for cancer therapy. These drugs can now be tested easily utilizing Dr. Ambati's cornea model.

Dr. Ambati has also received national recognition when his photograph and an article on his research appeared on the cover page of the December issue of *VA Research Currents*, a publication that highlights research conducted by VA researchers through out the country. This article highlighted another research paper published by Dr. Ambati in a recent



Dr. Balamurali K. Ambati

issue of *Investigative Ophthalmology and Visual Science*. Dr. Ambati demonstrated that potentially blinding blood vessel growth in the cornea, resulting from injury to the eye can be reduced using a synthetic protein engineered in his laboratory. This protein can be utilized to help patients in many situations where blood vessel formation is detrimental such as in diabetic retinopathy, macular degeneration and cancer. Dr. Ambati's research was funded by a VISN 7 Career Development Award and VA Merit Review funding for three years.

Dr. Thomas Hartney, Medical Director, Geriatrics and Rehabilitation Service Line was recognized for being awarded a prestigious "Certificate for Top Performance in America" in the ONTARGET and TRANSCEND research projects. This study being conducted throughout the country involves several research/medical centers. ONTARGET stands for ON going Telmisartan Alone and in combination with Ramipril Global Endpoint Trial, while TRANSCEND is Telmisartan Randomized Assessment Study in ACE intolerant subjects with cardiovascular disease. Angiotensin converting enzyme inhibitors have been shown to reduce cardiovascular disease risk and increase survival and prevention of myocardial infarction, strokes, heart failure etc. Therefore, the objectives of the ONTARGET clinical trial are to determine whether the combination of angiotensin receptor blocker telmisartan and angiotensin converting enzyme inhibitor ramipril is more effective in combination, compared to individual treatments. The TRANSCEND will determine whether telmisartan is superior to placebo in

patients. Among all the centers involved in this trial, the success of Dr. Hartney's group was judged to be one of the best.

Dr. William Hill serves as Director of the Stroke Laboratory, Chairperson of the VA Research and Development Committee and a member of the Proposal Review Committee. His research is centered on vascular injury in Alzheimer's disease and the role of stem cells in repair and minimization of injury following stroke. Dr. Hill received a VISN 7 Career Development Award in 2001, and was later awarded VA Merit Review funding for his research on stroke. About 600,000 Americans suffer from stroke each year and it is estimated that treatment of stroke costs nearly \$56 billion in the U.S. alone. These facts substantiate that more research is needed to understand the effects of stroke on the brain and to find methods to minimize the adverse effects. Stroke is known to damage brain cells and repair of the tissue is rather difficult with questionable success. Methods to hasten the repair of the damaged brain cells are expected to preserve nerve cells which would otherwise die, causing more damage to the brain. Dr. Hill hypothesized that adult stem cells (not to be confused with fetal stem cells) from the patient's own bone marrow may have the potential to generate functional brain cells.

Dr. Hill was recently awarded the VISN 7 Henry Middleton Research Excellence Award in recognition of his contribution to this critical field and to honor the researcher whose has had the greatest impact on VA health care.

Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Celebration

A celebration honoring the memory and accomplishments of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. was held on Wednesday, January 10. The featured speaker, Reverend Clinton Edwards Jr., pastor of Friendship Baptist Church in Aiken, South Carolina, focused on Martin Luther King, The Suffering Servant. This moving program included a musical presentation by a patient group, The Uptowners, directed by Sheri Smith, Music Therapist. This annual event is sponsored by the African American Program Committee.

Photo: Left to right: John S. Goldman, Acting Medical Center Director presents a plaque to Rev. Clinton Edwards, Jr. following MLK celebration.



VA Secretary Names New Associate Director for Operations



John S. Goldman was appointed the Augusta VA Medical Center Associate Director for Operations on January 7, 2007. Goldman began his VA career in

Augusta as an administrative officer for the Radiology Department. Since then, he has held positions of increasing responsibility and comes to Augusta from the Tuscaloosa VA Medical Center where he was the Deputy Director.

Mr. Goldman holds undergraduate degrees in respiratory and psychology and has graduate credits in Health Care Management. He has also attended the Federal

Executive Institute for federal health care executives and Leadership VA. Prior to becoming Deputy Director in Tuscaloosa, Goldman served as

special assistant to the Department of Veterans Affairs Under Secretary for Health in Washington, DC. He has played a pivotal role in enhancing VA/DoD collaborations serving on the VA/DoD Strategic Executive Group for the VA Southeast Network which encompasses three states – Georgia, South Carolina and Alabama.

Goldman will also be acting as medical center director for the two division facility until VA Secretary James Nicholson announces a replacement for that position.

His personal interests include fishing, golf and community involvement. Mr. Goldman is married and will reside in the Augusta area with his wife, Julie.

New VA Southeast Network Director



Lawrence A. Biro has been named the new Network Director for the VA Southeast Network (VISN 7) and will assume the leadership role on March 4, 2007. Mr. Biro will be responsible for VA medical centers and veterans' health care services throughout Alabama, Georgia and South Carolina.

Mr. Biro comes to VISN 7 as departing Network Director of the VA Rocky Mountain Network (VISN 19), where he has served since October, 2003. Mr. Biro will now lead VA's health care mission on behalf of the ninth largest national veteran population of approximately 1.3 million in a region containing eight VA medical centers and more than two dozen community-based outpatient clinics. As Network Director of VISN 19, Mr. Biro managed a budget of nearly \$1 billion and more than 4,600 employees. Mr. Biro has maintained successful focus

on quality patient care delivered efficiently through implementation of a comprehensive system of metrics, resulting in VISN 19's first place national ranking in meeting VHA Performance Measures in 2004 and 2005. Under his leadership, in 2006 VISN 19 was awarded the prestigious VHA Kenneth W. Kizer Quality Achievement Award and the Secretary of Veterans Affairs' Robert W. Carey Performance Excellence Award for outstanding leadership on behalf of the nation's veterans.

Mr. Biro holds memberships in a variety of organizations, and has been recognized by VHA for his expertise in business practices management. He received the Distinguished Presidential Rank Award in 2006 in recognition of his leadership. A native of Michigan, Mr. Biro is an Army veteran and holds a doctorate in education.

Special Employee Honored

Did you know that over 3,500 VA employees have a disability? These employees are a vital part of the VA team and important to the provision of quality patient care. Each October, National Disability Employment Awareness Month is celebrated across the country. It is a special time when those in the workforce with disabilities are recognized.

At the Augusta VA, the People with Disabilities Program Committee select an Employee of the Year with Disabilities from numerous nominations and sponsor a ceremony during National Disability Employment Awareness Month to recognize and honor this individual. Doris Nelson, the 2006 Employee of the Year with Disabilities, is a Social Worker who pursued her education while raising a family and working as an entry level clerk at the Augusta VA. Her nomination states, "With crutches and a backpack, Doris went back to college, juggling a grueling schedule five days a week, traveling to and from the University of South Carolina. Through determination and inner strength

she obtained her Masters Degree. Being a disabled veteran herself, Ms. Nelson has an innate ability to empathize while demonstrating a "can do" attitude. She is an inspiration to all and brings hope through her examples that anyone would do well to follow.

Lena Richardson, Chief, Allied Health Service Line, congratulates Doris Nelson, Employee of the Year with a Disability, as a certificate is presented by James F. Trusley, Medical Center Director.



First CRNA Class Graduates

December 8, 2006, a special ceremony took place at the Augusta VA Medical Center. The graduation of the first class of the Veterans Affairs/Department of Defense Nurse Anesthetist Training Program was held. Graduates Heather Joe, James Wilcox II, and Henry Wright were the graduating pioneers of this unique program. The ceremony, attended by approximately 50 family members, co-workers, and representatives from Central Office, focused on the long hours, hard work and dedication required by the graduates to earn their CRNA title. Guest speakers included Dr. Michael Bishop, National Director of Anesthesia Service and Dr. William Duncan, Chief, Consultant Medical/Surgical Services, both from VA Central Office; and Maureen Reilly, PhD, CRNA, professor at Fort Sam Houston, San Antonio, Texas, where Phase I of the training took place.

Special awards were presented to the graduates. James Wilcox II received the first 2006 Leland Winger Award for Outstanding Academic and Clinical Class Ranking. This will continue to be an annual award presented to one outstanding member of each graduating class. Heather Joe and Henry Wright received plaques honoring them as members of the first class of the Department of Veterans Affairs Nurse Anesthetist program.



Pictured left to right: CRNA graduates, Henry Wright, James Wilcox II and Heather Joe

The future looks bright for these graduates and the VA, as they all begin their career in VA Medical Centers around the country. Heather Joe will be working in Birmingham, James Wilcox II, Las Vegas, and Henry Wright, Seattle.

EMPLOYEE WELLNESS NEWS

Want to make a change
for the New Year? . . .

THE LUCKIEST LOSER

3 4 5 6 7 8

Be a part of the VA's first Luckiest Loser Competition! More information to follow soon or contact Denise Whitten at ext.

The Employee Wellness Committee continues to work to provide opportunities to improve employee health and well being. New initiatives for 2007 include a weight loss contest co-sponsored with the Employee Enhancement Group called the Luckiest Loser. This contest will involve employees forming teams for a 12 week weight loss competition. At the end of the 12 weeks, the teams/individuals with the most weight loss will receive prizes. All participants will receive nutritional information and guidance during the competition to encourage and promote healthy weight loss methods.

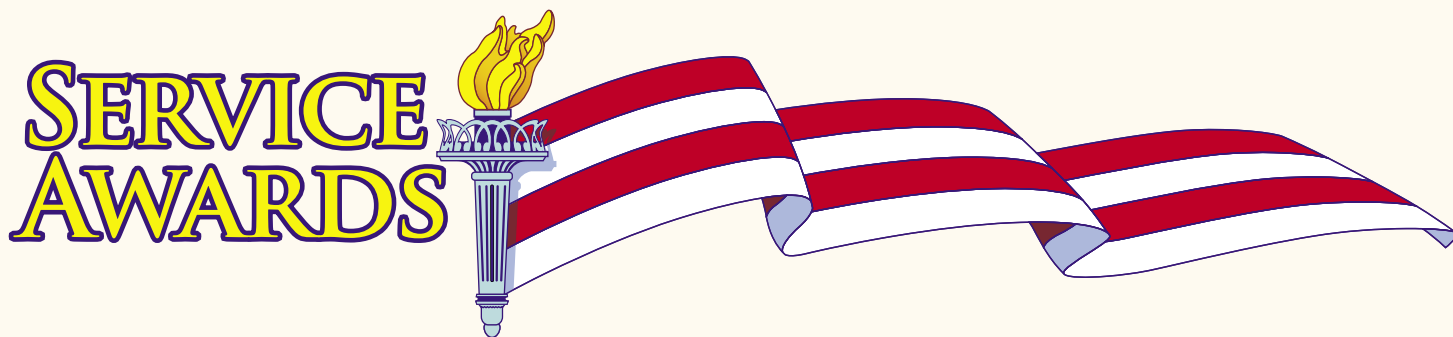
In addition, the Employee Wellness Committee will soon announce the opening of a new Downtown Division Wellness Center. Employees will be able to access the Cardiac Rehabilitation Clinic on the first floor during the evenings and weekends when no patient care activities are scheduled. This clinic will include treadmills and stationary bikes. Watch for more information.



HealthierFeds Physical Activity Challenge 2007

The Office of Personnel Management (OPM) and the President's Council on Physical Fitness and Sports is sponsoring the 2007 HealthierFeds Physical Activity Challenge January 22 – March 18.

This is your opportunity to commit to a fitness routine. Details and registration are available at <http://www.healthierfeds.gov>.



EMPLOYEE OF THE MONTH:

Patricia Story
(November)

Jo-Ann Capozzoli
(December)

Gwen Williams
(January)

STAR TRECC AWARDS:

Michelle Peeples
(November)

Ilene Gresham
(December)

Daphne Freeman
(January)

The following employees have reached a special milestone in their years of government service during the months of August, September & October:

40 Year Service Award:

Julie M. Choate-Bell
Ralph L. Elkins

35 Year Service Awards:

Ellen B. Hood
John R. Smalls

30 Year Service Awards

Denise F. Anderson
Ola M. Basket
Celso G. Bolet
Willie F. Downs
Floyd B. Everett

Abe R. Freeman
Dennis R. Horton
Frances T. Jackson
Laura A. Jackson
Rosa C. Meno
Annie L. Parks
James R. Pyron
Larry J. Scott
Willie O. Sims, Jr.
Debra E. Stokes
Calvin Thomas, Jr.

25 Year Service Awards

Barbara A. Blueford
Weldon D. Dunham
Steven Dunning
Janice T. Garrett
Rosalyn L. Glasper
John W. Hensley
Juanetter A. Moore
Tanya J. Robinson
Cheryl H. Royal
Harold D. Thompson

20 Year Service Awards

Nettie N. Albrecht
Anita D. Carter
Andre M. Carrington
Regina P. Castro
Mary M. Cole
Epifanio Ramos-Cortes
Carlos J. Debritto
Bobby D. Evans
Deborah L. Funches
Hope P. Izzett
Gail K. Kaitschuck
Wanda L. Lowe
Gary McCullough
Sheila A. Siler
Tonya C. Sims
Yolanda E. Tomlinson
Rose C. Trinchler

15 Year Service Awards

Anne M. Spensley Arnold
Michelle L. Bartlett
Jegeory O. Burton
Cheryl G. Butler
Louise Byrd
Alicia Y. Canaday

Charles E. Day
Sandra L. Hadwin
Donna G. Ingram
Barbara Jean Jackson
Herman R. Killings
Sharon D. Labbe
Lisa T. Sanford
Clarissa A. Seymore
Aotearoa Sualevai
Russell A. Van Horn

10 Year Service Awards

James J. Babula
Patricia Benitez
Alice F. Boatner
Latasha D. Cauley
Claudia M. Colbert
Lewis E G Collins, Jr.
J Tyler French
Alphonso D. Friday
Charles E. Genoe, Jr.
Janice P. Hawkins
Vicki M. Isdell
Lucia Mason
Robert J. Monroe
Shyamala Mruthinti
Erika H. Richardson
Thomas L. Story, Jr.

Congratulations to...

Frank Ewald, Jr., M.D.

who has been selected as the Associate Chief of Staff for Research and Development



Dr. Lloyd B. Schnuck Jr., VAMC Chief, Imaging and Radiology who was presented the Medical College of Georgia (MCG) 2006 Vessel of Life Award by MCG President Daniel Rahn.



Lori Clarke, Active Duty Rehabilitation Unit Nurse Manager, who is now Board Certified in Nursing Administration through the American Nurse's Association.



Pulse Points

Workload for Fiscal Year 2006 (October 2005 through September 2006)

- ★ 6,517 discharges
- ★ 312,550 outpatient visits
- ★ an average daily census of 109 in the NHCU
- ★ an average daily census of 52 in the domiciliary
- ★ 1,330,031 prescriptions filled

Important Information

If you have any concerns about patient care and safety in the medical center that have not been addressed by the staff, you are encouraged to contact medical center management. This is most easily done by contacting a Patient Advocate. If your concern is still not addressed, you are encouraged to contact the Joint Commission for Accreditation of Healthcare Organizations (JCAHO). The JCAHO toll-free number is 1-800-994-6610. This hotline is available 24 hours a day, seven days a week.

Check it out!

A comprehensive study by Harvard Medical School concludes that federal hospitals, including those run by the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA), provide the best care available anywhere for some of the most common life-threatening illnesses. The study was published December 11 in the *Annals of Internal Medicine*, a journal for health care professionals. Researchers looked at congestive heart failure, heart attack and pneumonia across the health care industry and found that patients in federal facilities are more likely to receive high-quality care than those in for-profit hospitals.

Did You Know?

A nosocomial, or hospital-acquired, infection is a new infection that develops in a patient during hospitalization. According to CDC's National Nosocomial Infections Surveillance (NNIS) system which monitors trends in nosocomial infections,

- ★ 38% of all nosocomial infections in surgical patient are surgical site infections.
- ★ Surgical site infections increase length-of stay in the hospital by an average of 7.5 days.
- ★ The estimated cost in the USA for surgical site infections is \$130 million to \$845 million per year.

What should you know about preventing a surgical site infection?

- ★ In most cases, you should receive an antibiotic within one hour of your surgical incision.
- ★ You should receive an antibiotic that is recommended for your particular surgical procedure.
- ★ In most cases, your antibiotic should be discontinued within 24 hours of surgery.
- ★ If you require any hair removal for your surgery, this should be done with clippers or a depilatory and **NOT** a razor.

The Augusta VAMC website
is now available for staff and
veterans at:
<http://www.va.gov/augustaga>





2006 Uptown and Downtown Employee Holiday Receptions

2007 Brings New Rewards for Employee of the Month

The Employee Enhancement Group has announced new, more exciting ways of recognizing the Employee of the Month (EOM). Beginning with the selection in January 2007, the EOM will receive:

- ★ \$200.00 Special Recognition Award
- ★ Four Hour Time Off Award
- ★ \$20.00 gift certificate to the VA Canteen
- ★ Reserved parking space for one month
- ★ Marquee announcement on the sign at the Downtown Division
- ★ Surprise delivery from the EOM Subcommittee and member of management
- ★ The Employee of the Year will be selected from the 12 Employees of the Month. The Employee of the Year will receive a \$750.00 Special Contribution Award, Four Hour Time Off Award, and a reserved parking space for one year.

